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RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 3568
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SUBJECT: INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS COMMENT ON PAKISTAN'S ELECTIONS

¶1. Summary: International election observation teams, including Pakistani NGO Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN), the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM), and Democracy International (DI) issued statements on February 19 and 20 commenting on the February 18 parliamentary elections. The groups expressed general satisfaction with the election administration, although all noted irregularities on election day, criticized the pre-election political environment and made recommendations for future reforms. End summary.

FAFEN

¶2. FAFEN is a coalition of 40 Pakistani civil society organizations established in 2006 to observe the election process, educate voters and advocate for electoral and democratic reform. Approximately 18,829 FAFEN observers visited around 8,000 polls on election day. FAFEN is funded through The Asia Foundation with U.S. and other international donor assistance. In a press statement February 19, FAFEN emphasized that they would continue to observe the remaining processes and stressed the need for long-term reform, including improvement of the computerized voter list and a more independent Election Commission. FAFEN noted irregularities observed at the polls including violence, irregular voter identification, restrictions on observers, absenteeism of polling officials, and closed women's polling stations. FAFEN also conducted a parallel vote tabulation (PVT) which will be released in a few days.

EUROPEAN UNION

¶3. EU EOM utilized short-term and long-term observers who, since December 9, 2007, observed over 65% of the constituencies. On election day, 131 observers from 23 countries monitored 115 constituencies. EU EOM presented preliminary results of their observation on February 20. They noted that the parliamentary elections were a competitive process that increased public confidence but were hindered by problems with the election framework and environment. Michael Gahler, Chief Observer of the EU EOM, said that the election process went better than expected, but he refused to comment on whether the elections were "free, fair or transparent," calling those labels too simplistic. EU EOM described these elections as "no worse" than those in 2002 and a "step ahead" in some areas. The Chair of the European

Parliament Delegation, Robert Evans, lauded the elections as a "stepping stone" to full democracy in Pakistan.

¶4. Like FAFEN, the EU EOM focused on pre-election irregularities, repeatedly noting that the pre-election environment favored the government's party. They noted some organizational deficits, including understaffed and overcrowded female polling stations and some polling stations where EU EOM observers were prevented from observing ballot tabulation at a "close enough" distance. Very few returning officers displayed constituency results with a breakdown of polling stations as promised by the Election Commission. In a response to a question on polls that denied female voters, the Deputy Election Observer said EU EOM would address this with the Election Commission and suggest declaring elections in these areas null and void.

¶5. EU EOM made several recommendations for continued electoral reform, including requiring posting of results from each individual polling station, speedy and transparent processing of complaints and appeals, a single and a comprehensive voter list. EU EOM will continue to observe the post-election process, including results consolidation and redress for complaints and appeals. The EU EOM will provide more detailed information in their final report which will be issued within two months of completion of the entire process.

DEMOCRACY INTERNATIONAL

¶6. Democracy International (DI), led by former congressman Jim Moody, arrived in Pakistan on February 10 and fielded 38 short-term observers on election day in Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, Multan and Islamabad. DI was funded by a grant

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from USAID after the International Republican Institute canceled its mission in the wake of post-Bhutto assassination violence. DI presented results on February 20, stating that their observers viewed election day as having been relatively peaceful, blunting expectations of violence and systematic manipulation. DI observed that overall balloting and counting processes were conducted in accordance with established procedures. DI focused on pre-election irregularities, observing that the pre-election political environment presented serious obstacles to a fully democratic election. DI observers viewed some systemic problems on election day, including inaccurate voter lists, limited voter turnout, and low participation of women and recommended the Election Commission address these irregularities to improve the overall electoral process.

PATTERSON